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OCEAN TRANSPORTATION TO EASTERN ASIA.

BY EUGENE T. CHAMBERLAIN, UNITED STATES COMMISSIONER OF
NAVIGATION.

The commercial aspirations of the United States, in so far as they have any geographical bent, are unquestionably turned to-day across the Pacific to the markets of the temperate zone of Eastern Asia. The more far-sighted of our public leaders, including the great projectors of industrial and transportation enterprises quite as much as the leaders of parties, and the most intelligent of our newspapers, for several years sought to impress upon our people the fact that a commercial struggle, not without its political phases, was in progress for the control of, or for a large participation in, the new markets of the ancient Empire of China, and that we could not afford to be indifferent to it. These efforts had possibly made some headway, though the evidence of progress certainly did not appear on the surface of American thought. What was needed was an awakening of sentiment such as would make the coast of Asia a real thing to the American mechanic, farmer and miner, a thing, that is to say, in which he had an immediate interest; and that was effected by our naval victory at Manila. The map of Asia and of the Pacific has been studied nowhere else so carefully during the past year, by the millions to whom in all civilized countries industrial and commercial growth means livelihood and comfort, as on the farms and in the factories and stores and offices of the United States.

The relative accessibility of the markets of Asia from the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts of Europe and from the Pacific coast of the United States depends, of course, as much on facilities of transportation as on distance. What the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 did for Europe in improving transportation facilities to the East is familiar to every one; in a word, it permitted

economical communication by steamships. We are not all, perhaps, so familiar with the possibilities which the employment of steel in the construction of the hulls of merchant steamships, begun in 1879, has opened to the United States in its trans-Pacific trade.

The distance by way of the Suez Canal from Marseilles to Hongkong is 7,903 nautical miles, to Manila 7,906 miles, to Shanghai 8,758 miles, and to Yokohama 9,476 miles. The direct distance from San Francisco to Hongkong is 6,086 miles, to Manila 6,254 miles, to Shanghai 5,550 miles, and to Yokohama 4,564 miles. The advantage of our Pacific coast ports, in respect of distance, over Mediterranean ports is evident. The advantage, of course, increases in contrast with the Atlantic ports of Great Britain, Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands. Distance, however, is not alone to be considered. To make that difference in distance tell in their favor, steamships from our Pacific coast must carry coal for the entire voyage across the Pacific, with a corresponding increase in expense and reduction in the space which can be devoted to earning freight money, while the Suez route offers several opportunities for re-coaling, and in consequence permits the employment of more space for freight-earning cargo. A digression from the direct route to Honolulu means a loss of from 400 to 1,000 miles to the steamship bound from San Francisco to Eastern Asia.

The use of steel in the construction of hulls has made it possible to build steamships so large that they can carry the 3,000 tons of coal, or thereabouts, necessary to traverse at full speed the 6,000 miles which separate our coasts from China. (The great importance of the triple expansion engine in reducing coal consumption is not overlooked, but its relations to the Pacific problem do not call for remark here.) The great inventors of modern steel processes have thus done as much for the trans-Pacific commerce of the United States as de Lesseps did for Europe's trade with the Orient.

The increase in the speed of ocean steamships during the past decade has not been so great as to excite well-founded wonder; it has not been very generally distributed, and at best it is not of prime commercial importance. The real marvel of the past ten years, and the substantial contribution which shipbuilding has recently made to the world's commerce, has been the increase in the

size of ships. In 1892, Lloyd's Register recorded 173 steel vessels and 93 iron vessels, 266 in all, of 4,000 gross tons or upwards. Lloyd's Register for 1900 shows 69 iron vessels and 743 steel vessels, 812 in all, of 4,000 gross tons or upwards. Eight steel steamships of over 8,000 gross tons were recorded in 1892, while for this year 64 such steamships are named. A steamship of less than 4,000 gross tons will soon prove a commercial impracticability for our trans-Pacific trade.

The appearance of large steel steamships in the trade directly across the Pacific will in time revolutionize the relations of the commercial, manufacturing and agricultural world to the uncounted millions of Asia. If the opportunity is promptly seized by the United States, the changed conditions may be made almost immediately the source of enormous addition to our national wealth. In the competition between the Suez route and the direct route across the Pacific, Europe will be handicapped by the canal tolls, which average over one dollar and a half per net ton (Moor-som)—equivalent to nearly a dollar a ton of cargo, both going and coming, in the case of a full-laden ship, and more, of course, if the vessel is laden only in part. To offset this extra charge levied on freight, Europe, however, enjoys the advantages of cheaper ships and lower cost of operation for its merchant fleets. These two considerations are disputed occasionally by those who have not taken the slight trouble required to ascertain the facts, but the facts are not equivocal or ambiguous. The appearance of large steamships on the Pacific opens the way also for fast steamships; and here, too, because of the shorter distances of the direct route, the United States have the advantage of nations which must use the Suez Canal.

The commercial importance of the new conditions of ocean transportation to Eastern Asia seems to have been more fully and more quickly realized by foreign countries than by the United States, which in all its interests ought to be the greatest beneficiary of the new order of things. While we are, many of us, chopping over academic theories and discarded or inopportune policies, other nations are contriving to make the best for themselves out of the situation. The German cabinet report which announced to the Reichstag the purchase of the Carolines and the Ladrões (except Guam) was accompanied by a chart showing the new lines by which the North German Lloyd Steamship Com-

pany proposed to bind these islands, whose purchase at that time had not been ratified, to other German possessions in Asia! On the other hand, while we have held the Philippines for many months, while for months Europe and Asia have been guessing about our commercial policy, here at home some men are still debating whether it will be "worth while" to establish American transportation lines to the East!

The first nation to make practical use of the new conditions on the Pacific was Japan, which for some time has had in operation to the United States seventeen-knot steamships of 6,000 gross tons, the largest and fastest vessels now employed on the Pacific Ocean, exceeding in size and speed the Canadian Pacific's "Empress" steamships, which Great Britain, in anticipation of the future, now become present, began to subsidize in 1892.

The beginnings only have been made in actual development of the direct Pacific route to Asia, with the Pacific coast of North America as a basis. Europe has been preparing, however, for the competition for several years. In 1895, France renewed and extended her subsidies to the Messageries Maritimes Steamship Company; in 1897, Great Britain renewed her subsidies to the Peninsular & Oriental Steamship Company; and, in 1898, Germany renewed and extended her subsidies to the North German Lloyd Steamship Company. The nature of these subsidies has been entirely changed by the considerations hastily noted. They are no longer contracts for the quickest performance of a public service, the transmission of the mails, because the quickest route to Eastern Asia from London, Paris, Berlin, Hamburg, Bremen, Antwerp, Rotterdam, Rome, Trieste, Vienna and Marseilles is not now by the Suez Canal, but across the Atlantic, across the North American Continent by rail, and thence across the Pacific to Yokohama, Shanghai, Kiaochao, Hongkong and Manila. The best time now possible from the capitals of Europe to Shanghai by the Suez route is thirty-two days. The Berlin mails reach New York in nine days, the Paris mails in eight, and the London mails in about seven. The New York mails reach San Francisco in four days and three hours. Seventeen-knot steamships can cross from San Francisco to Shanghai in sixteen days, allowing for the change of time in mid-Pacific, which is a loss for westward but a corresponding gain for eastward mails. The ocean mail and passenger lines to Asia, which Europe now subsidizes with about \$4,500,000

a year, are slower on the average, taking voyages both ways, by five days, than the lines which the United States must within two or three years establish across the Pacific. They are slower than connections to-day possible, though not established, through Japanese steamships, also subsidized, which now enter our Pacific coast ports. These foreign mail contracts have thus become national agencies for the promotion of commerce, as they always were, though to a much less degree; and where they are coupled, as they always are by implication, if not in direct terms, with the requirement that the steamships filling the contracts shall be built by the nation which grants the subsidy, they are also agencies to promote national shipbuilding and national navigation.

A legislative proposition which has for one of its principal objects the establishment, as soon as practicable, of the best and greatest facilities for transportation between the United States and Asia is entitled to the careful consideration of every American. It is of as much importance to the cotton States of the South and the wheat and corn belts of the Northwest as it is to our seaboard constituencies. The mining regions of Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia and the Great Lakes, and the factories of New York, New Jersey, New England and the Central States are as directly concerned in it as are the commercial exchanges of our large cities.

Of the 5,390 clearances of steamships from this country for Europe in 1899, only 39 were under the American flag. Too much intelligence, industry and money have been expended by foreign companies and governments in establishing their shipping interests in the North Atlantic to render possible a speedy recovery by the United States of its former rank in that branch of ocean carrying. But the trade of the Pacific is relatively undeveloped. During 1899, there were only 185 clearances of merchant steamships from this country for all of Asia, of which, however, only 24, two a month, were American. There must be an increase in our transportation facilities very soon, as, for more than a year, the complaint has been made, all along the Pacific coast, that there is a lack of tonnage to carry cargoes of cotton, flour and lumber to China and Japan, and that in consequence our exports have been handicapped by heavy freight charges. Is this lack of tonnage on the Pacific to be supplied by American vessels, or do we purpose at the outset voluntarily to abandon the carrying trade of the Pacific to our foreign rivals, who have already acquired

control of the trans-Atlantic trade? The ocean-carrying trade of a nation is as much a national industry as any manufacturing process. It has a higher claim to national consideration than any other industry. To Great Britain it brings yearly an addition to national wealth estimated by her best statisticians at \$380,000,000. The carrying trade of the United States at this time is worth about \$175,000,000 to those who conduct it. What the Pacific carrying trade will be worth to the United States ten years hence is purely conjectural. Our exports and imports to and from Japan and China alone, for 1897, were valued at \$70,000,000. In ocean freights and passenger fares the carrying of this trade, as indicated by the report of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, was valued at about \$8,000,000. The total exports and imports of China and Japan, in 1899, were in round numbers \$475,000,000, of which the share of the United States was \$77,000,000. One is at liberty to make his own guess as to what the carrying of that trade brought to ocean vessels two years ago, and what, with its certain increase, it will bring in ten years hence to the nations whose ships transport it.

It is no disparagement of the ultimate utility of the Nicaragua Canal to assert that, to the present generations of Americans, the improvement of trans-Pacific transportation facilities is of much greater importance, and that the enduring interests at least of the grain-growing sections of the Northwest are more closely identified with the latter than with the former undertaking. The Nicaragua Canal undoubtedly should and will be constructed as an American enterprise, but it cannot thereby lose its international character. While our political interest in it will, from the beginning, doubtless be supreme, our commercial interests, at least for many years to come, from the very nature of things, will not be appreciably greater than those of Great Britain, to-day the world's ocean carrier. The construction of the Canal by the Government of the United States will be a material gift to all mankind, worthy of a great republic. The creation of an American mercantile marine on the Pacific is essentially a national proposition, involving the development of American strength, industrial, political and naval.

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